

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims without prejudice. The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of the Claims

Claims 1-24 (canceled)

- 25 (Previously presented) A drilling tool including a drill shaft for transmitting axial load, said drill shaft comprising a series of coaxial ring members connected together such that adjacent ring members are flexible in an axial plane relative to each other; wherein:
- each ring member is connected to an adjacent ring member by connecting member arranged to transmit torque therebetween;
 - axial supports extend between adjacent ring members so as to transmit axial loads therebetween
 - the connecting member and axial supports allow adjacent ring members to bend in one axial plane while remaining stiff in another axial plane offset by up to 90°; and
 - the connecting member and axial support are constituted by the same physical structure comprising pairs of links extending between connection points on one ring member to connection points on an adjacent ring member circumferentially offset by up to 90°, such that each connection point is connected by a pair of inclined links to the adjacent ring.
- 26 (Previously presented) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 25, wherein the connection points of links extending from one side of a ring member are aligned with those extending in the axial opposite direction.
- 27 (Previously presented) A drilling tool including a drill shaft for transmitting axial load, said drill shaft comprising a series of coaxial ring members connected together such that adjacent ring members are flexible in an axial plane relative to each other; wherein:
- each ring member is connected to an adjacent ring member by connecting member arranged to transmit torque therebetween;

- axial supports extend between adjacent ring members so as to transmit axial loads therebetween
 - the connecting member and axial supports allow adjacent ring members to bend in one axial plane while remaining stiff in another axial plane offset by up to 90°;
 - the connecting member and axial support are constituted by separate physical structures, the axial support comprising at least two axial links extending between circumferentially aligned points on adjacent ring members, and the connecting member comprising inter-engaging teeth projecting from the adjacent ring members.
- 28 (Previously presented) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 27, wherein the axial support comprises at least two axial links extending between circumferentially aligned points on adjacent ring members, and the connecting member comprises a torsion ring extending between the axial links and connected to a torsion link connected to one of the ring members at a point offset by up to 90° from the axial links.
- 29 (Previously presented) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 28, wherein the part of the axial link extending between the torsion ring and the ring member to which the torsion link is connected is substantially more flexible than the part of the axial link extending from the torsion ring to the other ring member.
- 30 (Previously presented) A drilling tool including a drill shaft for transmitting axial load, said drill shaft comprising a series of coaxial ring members connected together such that adjacent ring members are flexible in an axial plane relative to each other; wherein:
- each ring member is connected to an adjacent ring member by connecting member arranged to transmit torque therebetween;
 - axial supports extend between adjacent ring members so as to transmit axial loads therebetween
 - the connecting member and axial supports allow adjacent ring members to bend in one axial plane while remaining stiff in another axial plane offset by up to 90°;
 - the connecting member and axial support are constituted by separate physical structures, the axial support comprising at least two axial links extending between circumferentially aligned points on adjacent ring members, and the connecting

member comprising pairs of links extending between connection points on one ring member to connection points on an adjacent ring member circumferentially offset by up to 90°, such that each connection point is connected by a pair of inclined links to the adjacent ring; and

- each axial link is connected at one end to one of the ring members, and at the other end is separated from the other ring member by a small distance such that when an axial compressive load is applied to the tool, the axial link is contacted by the other ring member, and is moveable between a first position in which the axial support is located between the ring members and contacted by the ring members when compression is applied so as to resist bending in that direction, and a second position in which the axial support is positioned away from the ring members so as not to be contacted when compression is applied and so as not to resist bending in that direction.

31 (Previously presented) A drilling tool including a drill shaft for transmitting axial load, said drill shaft comprising a series of coaxial ring members connected together such that adjacent ring members are flexible in an axial plane relative to each other; wherein:

- each ring member is connected to an adjacent ring member by connecting member arranged to transmit torque therebetween;
- axial supports extend between adjacent ring members so as to transmit axial loads therebetween;
- adjacent ring members defining a cell that is flexible in an axial plane, the axial planes in adjacent cells being offset by a predetermined angle of up to 90°; and
- the drill shaft comprising two concentric drill shafts that are rotatable relative to each other such that when the axial planes of the cells are aligned, the tool can bend in that plane at that position, and when the axial planes of the cells are offset by the predetermined angle, bending of the tool at that point is resisted.

32 (canceled)

- 33 (New) A drilling tool including a drill shaft for transmitting axial load, said drill shaft comprising a series of coaxial ring members connected together such that adjacent ring members are flexible in an axial plane relative to each other; wherein:
- each ring member connects to an adjacent ring member by a connecting member arranged to transmit torque therebetween;
 - a plurality of axial supports extend between adjacent ring members so as to transmit axial loads therebetween;
 - the connecting member and the axial supports are configured such that adjacent ring members bend in one axial plane while remaining stiff in another axial plane offset by up to 90°; and
 - the connecting member and axial support comprise separate physical structures,
 - the axial support comprises at least two axial links extending between circumferentially aligned points on adjacent ring members, and
 - the connecting member comprises pairs of links extending between a plurality of connection points on one ring member to a plurality of connection points on an adjacent ring member circumferentially offset by up to 90°, such that each connection point is connected by a pair of inclined links to the adjacent ring.
- 34 (New) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 33, wherein each axial link is connected at one end to one of the ring members, and at the other end is separated from the other ring member by a small distance such that when an axial compressive load is applied to the tool, the axial link is contacted by the other ring member.
- 35 (New) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 33, further comprising a plurality of operable load supports configured for one of a first position and a second position; said first position in which the load supports are located between the ring members at points between the axial links and contacted by the ring members when compression is applied so as to resist bending in a first direction, and said second position in which the load supports are positioned away from the ring members so as not to be contacted when compression is applied and so not to resist bending in a second direction.

- 36 (New) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 35, wherein the load supports comprise tension latches which, in the first position, are engaged by the ring members when tension is applied, and which, in the second position, are not engaged when tension is applied.
- 37 (New) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 35, wherein the load supports are normally biased into the first position and can be moved into the second position by application of pressure on a button attached to an outer surface of each load member.
- 38 (New) A drilling tool as claimed in claim 34, wherein the axial support is connected at one end to one of the ring members, and at the other end is separated from the other ring member by a distance such that when an axial compressive load is applied to the tool, the axial support is contacted by the other ring member, and moveable between a first position in which the axial support located between the ring members and contacted by the ring members when compression is applied so as to resist bending in a first direction, and a second position in which the axial support is positioned away from the ring members so as not to be contacted when compression is applied and so as not to resist bending in a second direction.